



DISCOURSING DISCIPLINE IN INDIAN SCHOOLING SYSTEM

Pradeep Ramavath J

Assistant Professor , National Law School of India University, Bengaluru and Part time PhD Scholar at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru.

ABSTRACT

Paper examines the interrelationship that exists between discipline and school education in Indian context. After Right to Education Act of 2009 lot of discussion and confusion in the area of formal education; policies are being floated that decry any sort of punishment including verbal abuse, scolding etc, meted out to school going children. This thought is primarily influenced by western thoughts on pedagogy. In Asian countries including India, punishment has been long accepted as part of disciplining and bringing the child around and focus on learning. Our ancient education philosophy also eschews unbridled freedom to children in school and home. The role and nature of discipline in modern school education becomes important philosophical question that has repercussions over the cultural perception of children in society at large and family in particular. This paper surfaces few important dimensions of disciplining a child as part of education in the modern Indian schooling context.

KEYWORDS: Discipline, Punishment, Schooling, Education



Photo courtesy -Telegraph, 06 May 2010

"Discipline should enable the performance of, and be conducive to, the task at hand. It should enable freedom, choice and autonomy for both teacher and child".

National Curriculum Framework -2005

Discipline¹ has multivariate meanings of multiple shades as one approaches people in different socio-cultural contexts. Defining discipline in the diversified country like India is very challenging, but setting such a discourse is inevitable. What do we mean by discipline? Is it a principle, a way of life, a way of thinking and practice, what is it?, Is it an acquired character-or is it innate in every being?, These are some of the questions that need to be answered before we define the word, 'DISCIPLINE'. My argument is, it is all this and something more. For the author of the paper discipline is a self-induced response to external stimuli to,

- avoid repercussions
- gain from the situation and make best use of the stimulus for its own gain and also
- avoid serious mishaps and harms to it

So it is a continuous and lifelong learning process mediated by consciousness. In simple words, discipline is set of instructions, rules or norms set by adult community to control the undesirable/unmanageable behaviours expressed by the children. It is generally imposed through external loci or practiced through training the self. In children it needs to be brought through external locus -such as parental, family, school, community interference, values or by societal norms. Generally these practices are not in a textual format when it comes to 'discipline' within a family or in a community. Larger socio-cultural-religious practices and mainly the political ideologies of the region/State determine the nature of discipline to be followed by the 'disciples'. Thus set of disciplinary practices evolve and takes definite form through the societal values governed by the cultural and political practices dominant in the state at a particular context. While state sets the 'dictum' and 'dominant groups' determine the degree of hegemony in deciding the texture of 'discipline'.

In India hegemonic factors like caste, religion and class moulds the shape of 'discipline' and 'disciplinary practices', at home while the constitutional values and political ideologies determine the nature of discipline in the public and in Schools. This is reflected in the dichotomy of behavioural patterns of its individuals at home and in society. Discipline shapes certain attitudes and practices of individuals and prepares them to manage unforeseen circumstances and disasters. It instils self-confidence and courage to face certain odd circumstances. Thus it enables one to utilize his/her resources and capabilities gainfully to succeed in a given situation.

The argument in this paper is to critique the nature of discipline in our education system in general and to open up discussion on few important issues pertaining to practice of discipline in our schooling system. Whether the discipline should be enforced or it is something that can be learnt by self is an important ethical but controversial issue to be examined. In other words, should discipline measures be individualized or standardized? Generalized or contextualized? To what extent it should be individualized and to what extent it can be standardized are some of important philosophic questions. Is there a discipline, which is child friendly and at the same time prepare the child to future world? One of the important objectives of education is to prepare the child to future world of adults. It has to understand the world and standards set by the adult world and match its knowledge and skills to live in that world comfortably.

The fourth 'R'

Learning through instruction is something accepted universally as the easiest and fastest method of education one can have. This is based on the principle of assimilation of knowledge that is already in existence in the society at large and in that process discipline plays a major role. Learning by experience and self is also important, but it is not controlled or disciplined learning. It takes a longer time as learning is mainly contextual. Formal schooling has to address both challenges of instructional learning and natural learning.

Instinctive learning and construction of knowledge comes easily in informal set up. But such learning or knowledge remains at perception level most of the time, unless such learning is tested and gets affirmed through a series of similar or related experiences. But in the context of school, which aims at providing knowledge and learning skills in a more focused manner in a short time, such

luxuries cannot be offered. A judicious mix of both formal and non-formal space for learning can be a solution in this connection.

School learning in modern society, is most of the time non contextual and would be depending on the assimilative capacities of the child. As no one would like to assimilate something that is not immediately relevant, contexts have been created to help children to learn something that is not immediately relevant to it. It is here that discipline plays an important role.

Child in India starts its journey into the 'rat race' of knowledge reproduction at the age of three and continues to do so till it accomplishes the mastery over it. These 'rote' mechanisms in our education system do not nurture the values of creativity and innovation by subjecting children to unnecessary disciplinary actions. The school processes have become more mechanical, routine, and un-engaging. Because emphasis is only on scoring marks, whole system of education is in a false pursuit of improving quality, creating unnecessary stress on teachers, parents and more importantly children. This has few immediate visible repercussions such as significant reduction in the scope for play and games. Thus hard discipline without rationale and dialogue makes the system to collapse; we are already seeing the withdrawal of large section children from the system in these mechanistic, inhuman processes. In rural schools due to unprecedented practice of inhuman means of disciplinary actions at the early stages makes school as a 'scary house'. In turn children start searching for easy escape routes from the schooling system, thus challenging the instrumental value of formal schooling to the developmental process of the children.

Mass discipline and modern schooling system

Modern schooling system in India was created to serve the purposes of colonial rulers and most of the characters of schooling system including discipline were moulded as per the requirement of colonial economy. In today's context market forces determine the nature of discipline needed to be inculcated in our children. In ancient times it was native wisdom and community's aspirations which used to determine the nature of discipline to be practiced by their 'disciples'. Community schools, *Pathashalas*, *Madrasas* and *Maqtabs* helped in inculcating the discipline among the children in a systematic manner. The critique of such community led disciplining process was

- i. isolation of homogeneity and
- ii. exclusion of downtrodden communities from the literary processes

After independence, concurrent acts of disciplining the children based on class identities led to the emergence of hierarchical schooling system in India. Now we have more than 21 types of schooling systems in India with their own sets of 'dictum' on the idea of discipline. For a child in rural school of Northern Karnataka to use 'sexual slang' is well accepted as part of child's interaction both at the community and school, for these children personal hygiene, malnutrition, and cleanliness does not encompass the basket of 'discipline'. On the other hand high degree of visible discipline such as mannerism and standard physical outlooks of the children in elite international schools in India exposes stark realities of existing gaps in the physical visualization of discipline in schools. Drilling is one of most ancient method of disciplining practiced. Even today, it is being used extensively in many schools and systems especially sports, martial arts, and military services but they vary according to the status and class of the individuals.

Idea of 'Nationalism' in disciplining child

'Christianity' and 'Nationalism' are the two important ethical strands on which western civilizations have framed their educational machinery (Russel, Bertrand 1935). In India unquestioned religious and caste identities (*Varna*) have been meticulously used to define the framework for child's interaction. Even after years of independence formal schooling system has miserably failed to come out of these forms of inhibiting genotypic manipulations. In fact, it has tried to magnify these finer differences by rationalizing the idea of 'subjugation'.

Reforms initiated to align values in the curriculum to the larger vision of our constitution (NCF-2005) of ensuring JUSTICE, LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY are under severe attack by the fundamentalists, thus creating fractured 'identities of individuals'. These fractured identities of docile bodies perpetuate the idea of 'uncritical means' of bringing unwanted, unproductive disciplinary practices at different levels, thus defeating the idea of Nationalism in brining discipline among Children. Vicissitudes relating to disappearance of nationalism as idea in disciplining the child is indicated through decrease in participation of children in the voluntary activities and programs of national building. We can see a steep decrease in enrolment of rural children in popular voluntary services such as Sevalal, National Cadet Corps(NCC), *Bharath Scouts* and *Guides* etc. while cadres of fundamentalist organizations like RSS, Islamic groups are on the rise. Religion and discipline

Religion from the ancient times has played a crucial role in disciplining the senses of the human beings. In modern times also its dominance can be easily seen through the state sponsored religious interventions in schooling system. Secular Indian schooling system is a biggest victim of religion sponsored interventions to discipline the children.. Rather than creating the bonding between diverse cultures and identities such religion based interventions give

birth to fundamentalism and religious intolerance. These further takes severe fanatic forms and create hatred among different religious identities present in the society. These complex issues take severe irrational forms when scientific ways of disciplining the body and mind through meditation, yoga, fasting, practice of non-violence etc., gets associated with a particular religion or sect. Thus in a secular democratic societies it becomes very important to practice and nurture discipline in schools through non-religious means.

Literacy and discipline

Increased literacy among the rural women in India has demonstrated the reduction in child abuse and family violence (Hunter M.W, et al 2000). Increase in literacy also has a positive bearing on discipline of the children relating to health and hygienic issues; self-discipline as a practice is prominently visible in literate communities. Literacy has shown a positive influence on usage of softer forms of disciplining children. But few tribal communities show exception to such arguments by exhibiting high degree of discipline in the interactions even with no forms of literacy (Taylor, M.P 1877).

Discipline and punishment

Most common and easiest form of disciplining a child is though punishment. Punishment as a form of disciplining a child is age old practice. Even today, many believe that punishment is the panacea for many ills of the society and teaches all values and characters to the children.

"Dandam dashagunam baveth," is a famous Sanskrit shloka- meaning that punishment will inculcate all ten gunas (traits/characters/qualities) in a person. It is again debatable whether discipline and punishment are inseparable or discipline can be induced without punishment. Most of the time, they are used as synonym.

Variety of measures are adopted by the teachers in classroom and school in the name of disciplining children, it ranges from severe physical punishment to castiest remarks. These inhuman behaviours of few teachers create hatred and negative feelings towards whole teaching community itself. In this context one needs to critically look at what Right to education act of 2009(RTE 2009) is saying about the issue of discipline. It has clearly spoken in a negative tone on the issues of detention, retention, exclusion and expulsion, by completely forgetting to see the positive sides of these measures. In rural India even after the enactment of RTE-2009 'corporeal punishment' continues to don the canvas of disciplinary practices. It surfaces few critical questions on the ways and means of disciplining the children on the behaviors of deviation and withdrawal.

Since 80's, there is a hue and cry about the way children are raised in home and school. United Nations and international treaties have banned corporeal punishment and mental harassment to children in school and home completely. Most of the developed countries have already passed laws to ban any kind of punishment in schools and homes. Teachers in these countries have been persuaded to adopt positive discipline measures in their schools. However recent developments in Britain and US point out that complete ban of any kind of punishment will have adverse impact. There is a demand from parents and teachers in these countries to revive some form of punishment in schools and homes to mend children.

In our country also, even though no parent believe in inhuman methods of corporeal punishments to their children either at home or school, they do not like schools where no discipline is maintained. Punishment, if used judiciously and with correct understanding, could result in proper moulding of character and building in ten essential traits/qualities. They are:

- a. Fear
- b. Caution that his acts are watched and assessed by society
- c. Awareness that wrong doing are punished and right doing are appreciated
- d. Carefulness in doing any -thing properly in a socially acceptable fashion
- e. Continuous consciousness in doing any thought and action and desire to earn appreciation of public by doing good things
- f. Desire for social acceptance
- g. Respect for elders (Vinayathe)
8. Critical thinking about right and wrong
9. To do things the right way in right time and whatever one does should be done the right way and in time
10. Honesty in doing a work or study

But in order that punishment to become effective must satisfy following conditions,

1. Before a punishment is given, the punished must understand fully why he is being punished. He should accept consciously that whatever the act may be is wrong and why it is wrong and what is the consequence of such acts on others.
2. Punishment must never be violent or beyond the enduring capacity of a person and appropriate to the age and consequence.
3. The punisher must act with sense of equity and should understand fully well

the consequence of such punishment on the person.

4. No punishment must demoralize the punished person at any time.
5. The punisher must be kind hearted and compassionate and resort to punishment as the last choice. "Be Cruel only to be kind," must be the motto.
6. Punishment should not be inflicted with violent mind or personal vengeance or hatred.
7. Only a person who has no malaise intentions behind punishment, and who knows the difference between punishment and violence is authorized to give punishment.
8. The intentions of the punisher must be understood by the punished and appreciated by him.
9. All punishments must have the reformation of the punished behind them. Punishment without kindness would make the punished cruel in the end and become enemy of the society. The punished should understand that it is for his own good, that he has been punished.
10. The punisher should also know the other negative implications of his act and dispense with it only to reform the person.
11. Punishment should not be repeated as a routine. If punishment cannot bring in reformation, it should not be inflicted again and again.

The theory of positive discipline has many short comings. It teaches the child to see only positive side of life and try to negate fact that life is not always rosy nor rose has thorns too. Punishment though considered a negative approach, is more effective if dispensed with properly keeping in view the above tenets.

Punishment is abhorred in any civilized society. A mature society always believes in non-violent methods of resolving any issue even at the cost of suffering itself. Therefore punishment has to be resorted to at the end, when no other recourse is left to us. Punishment to be effective should not be vindictive at all. Cost of punishment in terms of its effect on the self-image of the person, social image of the person versus the damage one's act does on the society must be objectively assessed before punishment must be imposed on that person. The punisher must be fully confident that the punishment will not destroy the personality of the person but make him much more better and stronger person than before void the tendencies and qualities he had before the punishment. Punishments should not be repeated very often for the same or similar mistakes. Repetitive mistakes show clearly that the earlier punishment was not any use. Any punishment is a cruel waste, if its intentions and purpose is not served. Punishment must be exemplary ones. It should deter others from making similar mistakes. Otherwise, such punishments are of no use. When you consider all these aspects and limitations of punishment, we have to come to conclusion that punishment should be the least preferred method of disciplining the child. Punisher must possess highest sense of justice and compassion in order to deal with punishing the child. In disciplining a child, sense of justice and compassion for the well-being of the child should rule the disciplining process.

Conclusion:

Discipline has different shades of meaning; in India, discipline and punishment go synonymously. Education through discipline is way of maintaining the social order. While freedom is essential for knowledge construction, until one is prepared to start his own journey in that direction, some sort of discipline imposed from outside is needed. Discipline depends on socio-cultural factors and purpose of education also. For a country like India, which has adapted democratic way of life, severe discipline would curtail independent thoughts and action.

While self-discipline is the right choice, it comes late in one's life. Till that time, external disciplining is necessary. Whether discipline is possible without any sort of punishment, is the question everyone is interested in. While discipline is required for formal education, too much of it will kill the individual initiatives and make children like robots and will often develop negative attitudes towards life and society. A lot of research is needed to understand the nexus between discipline and pedagogic aspects and how much disciplining is judicious and can be imposed without becoming fetters to kill one's original and creative thinking and development.

REFERENCES

1. Hunter W.M et al., (2000), Risk factors for severe child discipline practices in rural India.
2. Journal of Pediatric Psychology. Vol.25, No.6, 2000, pp 435-447
3. NCERT (2005), National Curriculum Framework 2005, NCERT, New Delhi
4. Government of India (2009). Right of children to free and compulsory education act of 2009, MHRD, New Delhi
5. Russell, Bertrand (1935). 'Education and discipline' In Praise of Idleness. London: George Allen & Unwin
6. Taylor, Meadows (1877). The story of my life. Oxford University Press